



Legislative Bulletin.....September 20, 2001

Contents:

1. **H.R. 2657**—District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001
2. **H.R. 2061**—To amend the charter of Southeastern University of the District of Columbia

H.R. 2657— District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001 (DeLay)

Order of Business: The bill is scheduled to be considered under suspension of the rules on Thursday, September 20th.

Summary: H.R. 2657 would amend the District of Columbia Code to create the “Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.” Currently, there is a Family Division within the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. The bill requires that the new court hear all proceedings currently under the jurisdiction of the Family Division. Currently, other divisions of the Superior Court routinely hear cases that should be heard by the Family Court.

The legislation would establish provisions with respect to:

- The number of judges serving on the Family Court
 - not more than 15 at any one time
 - but not less than the number of judges determined by the chief judge of the Superior Court to be needed to serve
- Necessary qualifications needed for judges serving on the Family Court
- Terms of service
 - five years, unless otherwise excepted
 - not fewer than three years for currently sitting judges on the Superior Court, unless otherwise excepted
- The administration of cases and proceedings in the Family Court
 - emphasis on alternative dispute resolution procedures
 - establishment of standards of practice for attorneys appointed as counsel in the Family Court
 - “One Family, One Judge” policy, whereby the issues within the jurisdiction of the Family Court concerning one family or one child would be decided by one judge, to the greatest extent practicable
 - barring unusual circumstances, any Family Court action would remain under the jurisdiction of the Family Court until the action is disposed

- ensuring that all materials and services of the Family Court are **“understandable and accessible”** to the people served by the Court and that the Court is generally “family-friendly”
- On-site coordination of social services and other related services
 - services of such agencies as the District of Columbia Public Schools, the District of Columbia Housing Authority, the Child and Family Services Agency, the Office of the Corporation Counsel, the Metropolitan Police Department, the Department of Health, and other offices determined by the Mayor would be available at the Family Court
 - the Mayor would appoint a social services liaison to coordinate such services and provide information to the Mayor’s office
 - H.R. 2657 authorizes the appropriations of “such sums” each fiscal year to carry out the on-site coordination of social services**
- Expedited appeals
 - any appeal from an order of the Family Court terminating parental rights or granting or denying a petition to adopt would receive expedited review by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals
- The treatment of hearing commissioners as “magistrate judges”
- Rules for the selection of and authorized duties of Family Court magistrate judges

The chief judge of the Superior Court would be required to submit to Congress and the President within 90 days after the bill’s enactment a transition plan for the Court. Within two years of enactment, the Comptroller General would be required to submit a report to Congress and the chief judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on the transition to the Family Court and the progress of the provisions of this legislation. And within 3 months after the end of each calendar year, the chief judge of the Superior Court would be required to submit to Congress a report on the progress of the Family Court with respect to the provisions in this legislation.

The presiding judge of the Family Court would be required to carry out an ongoing training program in family law and related matters for Family Court judges, other Superior Court judges, and appropriate non-judicial personnel. The bill would also require the Executive Officer of the D.C. courts to establish an electronic tracking and management system for Family Court cases and proceedings, with all records and materials stored and maintained in an accessible electronic format. The Mayor of D.C. would be required to plan for the integration of the D.C. Government’s computer system with that of the Superior Court so that the Family Court and the appropriate offices of the D.C. Government which provide social services to people served by the Family Court will be able to access and share information on such individuals and families. **(H.R. 2657 would authorize “such sums” as would be necessary for this computer system integration.)**

The bill would authorize to be appropriated to the D.C. courts “such sums as may be necessary” (including sums necessary for salaries and expenses, and capital improvements for the D.C. courthouse facilities) to carry out this Act.

Cost to Taxpayers: CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost \$103 million over the 2002-2006 period (\$28.0 million in the first year), assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts.

Does the Bill Create New Federal Programs or Rules?: The bill would reorganize and provide new rules for a division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, as detailed in the “Summary” section above.

Constitutional Authority: A committee report citing constitutional authority is unavailable.

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H.R. 2061—To amend the charter of Southeastern University of the District of Columbia (Norton)

Order of Business: The bill is scheduled to be considered under suspension of the rules on Thursday, September 20th.

Summary: H.R. 2061 would amend the charter of Southeastern University of the District of Columbia by striking the requirement that one-third of the University’s Board of Trustees be alumni of the University.

Cost to Taxpayers: None.

Does the Bill Create New Federal Programs or Rules?: No.

Constitutional Authority: A committee report citing constitutional authority is unavailable.

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